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### **Offenders "Doing Time" in the Community: Orders of the New Downtown Community Court**

*Collaborative Effort of the City Attorney's Office, Downtown San Diego Partnership,  
San Diego Superior Court, San Diego Police Department and Office of the Public Defender*

**San Diego, CA:** Cleaner downtown streets! Less visible graffiti! The credit goes to offenders who are "doing their time" in the downtown neighborhoods they have harmed. Their court orders come from the new

Downtown Community Court. Offenders who have committed misdemeanor crimes downtown, including petty theft, graffiti, trespassing, drinking in public, and possession of marijuana, are being court ordered to perform community work service downtown. Since the court opened as a pilot project in October 2002, offenders have been ordered to perform 312 hours of work, including cleaning sidewalks, removing graffiti, picking up trash, and landscaping – valued at \$2,106.00.

"The Downtown Community Court is about community justice," City Attorney Casey Gwinn said. "When our prosecutors partner with police officers and community members, we are developing proactive solutions to improving quality of life in our neighborhoods rather than just responding to crime."

The goals of the Downtown Community Court are to hold offenders accountable to the community by requiring them to perform work service, reduce the number of quality of life crimes committed in downtown San Diego by requiring offenders to participate in educational and rehabilitative programs, and encouraging community involvement in the criminal justice system.

"The Downtown Community Court offers quality of life offenders in our misdemeanor arraignment court an option to perform specific services to restore the downtown community they have harmed. It is gratifying to note that all those accepting the opportunity have nearly completed their service and other conditions of probation," San Diego Superior Court Presiding Judge Richard E.L. Strauss said. "Superior Court

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will dismiss their violations in six months if they pay their fines and do not reoffend."

To-date, 19 offenders have been sentenced by the "Downtown Community Court." The crimes that have been committed include drinking in public (4), possession of marijuana (2), possession of open container (4), urinating/defecating in public (2), vandalism (2), petty theft (3), disturbing the peace (1), and trespassing (1). The majority of the crimes have been committed in East Village, Core-Columbia, Gaslamp and Marina areas. The Downtown Community Court involves the following neighborhoods: Core-Columbia (downtown financial district to waterfront), Cortez Hill, East Village, Gaslamp, Harborview, Horton Plaza, Little Italy, and Marina.

"A significant number of misdemeanors that affect our quality of life are committed downtown," said Chief of Police David Bejarano. "If this program can hold people accountable and reduce recidivism, it will mean fewer calls for police officers and will improve the downtown experience for everyone."

The Downtown Community Court is a collaboration of the San Diego City Attorney's Office, the San Diego Police Department, the Downtown San Diego Partnership, the Office of the Public Defender, the San Diego Superior Court, San Diego County Health and Human Services, community-based organizations, and community members.

The Downtown San Diego Partnership's Clean and Safe Program is supervising the work service. "This program is designed to hold non-violent, first-time offenders accountable for their crimes. Instead of sentencing quality of life offenders to costly and often unnecessary jail time, these people are required to complete community service in the area in which their crime was committed," Barbara Warden, President of the Downtown San Diego Partnership explained. "The Community Court Program is so successful in that it transforms a negative action into a positive reaction, helping to further clean up downtown San Diego."

At today's news conference, an offender, who committed the crime of petty theft at a shopping mall,

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said her experience with the Downtown Community Court was an "eye opener." She "gave back to the community" by picking up trash, and said it made her think twice about her criminal action which she regrets.

Initial funding for the Downtown Community Court was made possible through grants from the following agencies: Chairman of the County Board of Supervisors Greg Cox (\$15,000), County Board of Supervisor Ron Roberts (\$15,000), and the Downtown San Diego Partnership's Property Based Improvement District (\$25,000).

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